

Chapter 05: Dārṣṭāntika

The broad lineage of Sarvāstivāda comprises of the following:

1. The orthodox Abhidharmika-s based in Kashmir. They upheld the authority of the Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra ('Great Commentary') and came to be known as Vaibhāṣikas.
2. 'Western masters' – Abhidharmika masters west of Kashmir, based in Gandhāra.
3. 'Outside masters' – Referring generally to Sarvāstivāda masters outside Kashmir.
4. The Dārṣṭāntika masters.
5. Other individual masters.

Meaning of Dārṣṭāntika

Dārṣṭāntika < drṣṭānta + ika < drṣṭā

drṣṭā is what is 'seen'

drṣṭānta is 'visible example', example, simile

Dārṣṭāntika = 'Illustrators', 'masters of similes'

They are the preachers and meditators rolled into one. In preaching and instructing meditation, they are skilled in using similes, poems, hymns, etc; hence their name.

In the time of the Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra, the early Dārṣṭāntika who were the sūtradhara-s, with Dharmatrāta and Buddhadeva as the most eminent, also constituted a school of thought within the fold of the Sarvāstivāda. Even subsequent to the Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra, the Dārṣṭāntika leader, Kumāralāta, who was instrumental in the evolution of the Dārṣṭāntika into the Sautrāntika, was known to subscribe to the view of sarvāstivāda.

In the Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra, the Dārṣṭāntika are never referred to as the Sautrāntikas, although by the time of the AKB, the two appellations were seen to be used interchangeably. The Samayabhedoparacaṅka never mentions the Dārṣṭāntika-s as among the so-called 18 sects, and the Sautrāntika is noticeably enumerated at the very end of the list of the Sthaviravāda lineage. This suggests that the Dārṣṭāntika as a school or a movement evolved gradually into the Sautrāntika, some time after the compilation of the Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra. Broadly speaking, there existed two sections of the early Dārṣṭāntika-s – one more preoccupied with popular preaching and meditation, and the other with doctrinal disputations. It was probably from the latter that the Sautrāntika came to be evolved. The early Dārṣṭāntika masters were known for their active effort in popularizing the Buddha's teachings, employing poetry and possibly other literary devices in the world in the process, and were particularly skilled in utilizing similes and allegories in demonstrating the Buddhist doctrines. It was most probably for this reason that they came to be known as the Dārṣṭāntika. In the process of disputation, they also seemed to have

contributed to the development of Buddhist logic as the Vibhāṣika-s, themselves being proud of inconformity to logic, speak of the Sautrāntika-s as being arrogant in their skills. Professor Przyluski, however proposed that drṣṭānta (similes) is to be contrasted with sūtras, and that the two appellations Dārṣṭāntika and Sautrāntika referred to the same group of people.

Sūtra-dhara & anti-Abhidharmika

The Dārṣṭāntika-s descended from the sūtra-dhara lineage, and therefore esteems the authority of the sūtra-s. Their attitude is basically anti-Abhidharmika, though they never seemed to have totally rejected the Abhidharma doctrines. They are figured frequently in Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra, often repudiating the Abhidharmika doctrines, such as the category of ‘Conditionings disjoined from thought’. However, they were Sarvāstivādins, sharing the view of tri-temporal existence. Two of their leaders, Dharmatrāta and Buddhadeva in fact each offered a theory of Sarvāstivāda.

Kumāralāta as a Dārṣṭāntika leader

According to Xuan Zang’s tradition, the Dārṣṭāntika were so-called because their leader, Kumāralāta, composed a famous treatise known as *Array of Similes* (Dārṣṭāntika-pagkti). While this account seems simplistic, it nevertheless suggests that Kumāralāta must have been an important Dārṣṭāntika leader. Kumāralāta’s name was not mentioned in Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra, so he must have been after that period, around late 2nd or early 3rd century C.E.

Xuan Zang told us that he was considered one of the four suns of the period; together with Āśvaghoṣa, Nāgārjuna, and Āryadeva around 2nd to 3rd century C.E.) He is known to subscribe to the theory of tri-temporal existence.

The Dārṣṭāntika got involved in a dispute with the Abhidharmika-s

The Venerable Dārṣṭāntika masters assert thus:

Arising requires causes and conditions; but ceasing does not. Just as, in shooting an arrow, a propelling force is required; not when the arrow falls. The Abhidharmika-s assert that both the arising and ceasing of dharma-s require causes and conditions, for both ceasing and arising are activities. Question: How is one to explain the aforementioned simile (Drṣṭānta)? Answer: It need not be explained. For, worldly and noble dharma-s are different; they cannot be put on a par.”

One of the characteristics of the Dārṣṭāntikas is the anti-Abhidharmika attitude as can be seen in the doctrine of Sarvāstivāda.

“Some assert that endowment/possession and non-endowment/non-possession do not exist as real entities, like the Dārṣṭāntika-s. They say a sentient being is said to be endowed with a dharma when he is not separated from it. When he is separated from that dharma he is said to be not endowed with it. Both [terms] are mere concepts (Prajñapti 假施設). Just as, when the five fingers are folded, it is conceptualized as a fist; when they are separated, it is no more a fist.

Doctrine on citta-caitta – Successive arising

“The citta-caitta-dharma-s arise successively in dependence on causes and conditions. This is like the case of a group of merchants passing through a risky path: they go through one at a time; no two moving together. Likewise, where an assemblage of conditions obtains, citta-caitta-dharma-s arise one at a time, the conditions on which [their arising] depend being different in each case.” The Venerable Dharmatrāta asserts thus that all citta-caitta are specific types of cetanā (cetanā-viześa 思差別). The Venerable Buddhadeva asserts thus that the citta-caitta is none other than the citta.”

Due to their belief in the theory of momentariness and the theory of svabhāva, the Sarvāstivādins believe that the mind and mental conditionings forces/mental concomitants (caitasikas) necessarily arise together at the same time, responding to the same object through the same organ, in the same mode, each having the same number of members in the particular mental moment. These five are called the Five Matters of Equality – a principle governing the relationship between the mind and its mental concomitants. On top of this they also believe that in any mental moment, the mind must arise with at least ten mental concomitants with their mental concomitants arising together depending on the conditions. These mental concomitants are grouped under the concept of mahābhūmika-dharma-s. Remember that to the Sarvāstivādins, all dharma-s are conditioning, causal forces. So in their citta-caitta model, which can be called the ‘constellation model’ (compared to the ‘linear model’ of the Sautrāntikas), the mind and the mental concomitants mutually condition one another. The mind is the only ‘personal’ dharma, as it were, that marks one individual from another while all the other dharmas, even the caittas connected to citta, are objective forces activated by the citta, either directly (in the case of caittas) or indirectly (in the case of citta-viprayukta-dharmas and even rūpa – as vipaka-phala). Why is a person characterized by anger when another by greed? Why is one more patient than the other? In this model, these can be explained by understanding the citta as the ground, the field, for the activities of these mental concomitants. By mutual conditioning, a particular citta becomes more ‘fertile’ for the arising of certain groups of caittas. With the increasing frequency of the arising of such a constellation of caittas every time similar conditions arise, the mind’s characteristic becomes more and more fixed and in turn conditions the arising of a more and more fixed constellation of caittas. These are called habitual tendencies.

Cognition of an object: Dārṣṭāntika versus Sarvāstivāda

The Dārṣṭāntika-s assert thus: The True-self View (satkāya-drṣṭi) does not have existent objects. There is no true self, having cognition, it is not there. They explain thus: the True-self View speculates on the Self and what pertains to the Self. In the Absolute truth, there is no self or what pertains to the Self. Thus, when a person sees a rope, he says it is a snake; when he sees a post, he says it is a human being; etc. The same applies in this case. Hence it takes a non-existent object.

Question: In the Absolute Truth, there is no self or what pertains to the Self, how this view can have an existent object as claimed by the Sarvāstivādins?

Answer: This True-self View takes the five aggregates as its object and speculates on the Self and what pertains to the Self. This is just like the case that a person, taking a rope or a post as his object, speculates that it is a snake or a human being. It is a case of an error with regard to the mode of activity (i.e. Akāra 行相顛倒), because the five aggregates of grasping exist truly." This answer explains that the fault is not with the rope/post outside but with the mode of understanding. So we see different views. Understanding can be right or wrong. Sarvāstivādins will say, you can't have a snake without having the rope first, though the object is unreal but it is based on the real as there is always a real basis for the Sarvāstivādins. If there is an illusion, there is something real.

Another characteristic of the Dārṣṭāntika is the Idealistic tendency: Knowledge of non-existent objects

Some, like the Dārṣṭāntika-s, maintain that there exist knowledge's that take non-existent objects. Those which take such objects as an illusion, the Gandharva City, a fire-brand, a mirage, etc, are taking objects which are non-existent."

"Some, like the Dārṣṭāntika-s assert that dreams are unreal. In a dream, one saw that one has a lot of food and drink. [Yet,] upon waking up, one is hungry and thirsty and has a weak body. From this, it should be understood that dreams are unreal." According to the Sarvāstivāda, dreams are real in a conventional sense. There must have been some objects that generate awareness in the wakeful hours. The conceptualized something unreal is based on the real.

Idealistic tendencies: Unreal objects

The Dārṣṭāntika-s assert that the fetters that bind are real, but objects of bondage ... are unreal, [because] they do not have a fixed nature, as they may or may not generate defilement: This is just like the case of a good-looking woman, variously adorned, who enters into an assembly. On seeing her, some give rise to respect, some to greed, some to hatred, some to jealousy, some to disgust, some to compassion, and some to equanimity. That is to say: herein a son gives rise to respect; those sensually indulgent, greed; those with enmity, hatred; those sharing a husband with her, jealousy; those who have practised the contemplation on the impurities, disgust; those sages who are detached, compassion, thinking this beautiful appearance will soon be destroyed by impermanence; those who are arhat-s, equanimity. Accordingly, one knows that the object does not exist as a real entity.

According to the Dārṣṭāntika's attitude to the Karma doctrines, they assert that all bodily, vocal and mental karma-s are none other than volition. The Dārṣṭāntika-s, maintain that apart from volition (cetanā 思), there is no retribution cause; apart from sensation (vedanā 受) there is no retribution fruit. The cause of karma is in the mind, retribution is all in the feeling. Karmic cause is all mental – in the mind. They are meditators. The Dārṣṭāntika-s asserts that the intermediate-existence karma can be transformed, since all karma-s are transformable. They say: even the karma of the five gravest transgressions (Anantarya 五無間業) can be transformed, not to speak of the intermediate-existence karma. The five gravest offences are – patricide, matricide, killing a Buddha, killing an arahant and causing a schism in the Sangha. This shows that the Dārṣṭāntika are very open minded and liberal in their thinking as

well as being tolerant. Karma is not fatalism, it can be changed but probably not to the extent of the Dārṣṭāntikas.

Emphasis on meditation

According to the Dārṣṭāntika-s: the Truth of Unsatisfactoriness comprises of Nāma rūpa (名色); of the Origin, karma-defilement; of the Cessation, the cessation of karma-defilement; of the Path, śamatha and Vipassanā (奢摩他毘鉢舍那)

The Dārṣṭāntika-s even shared a view with the Vibhajyavādins on subtle citta, one of the first to show this attitude. The Dārṣṭāntika-s and the Vibhajyavādins maintain that in the extinction-attainment (nirodha-samāpatti 滅盡定), the subtle thought does not cease. They assert that there can be no sentient being that is without matter, and no meditation that is without thought." In Buddhism, it is recognised that one can reach a high level in meditation where there is no thoughts at all (nirodha-samāpatti). This is also recognised by all schools of Buddhist thoughts.

The word 'samāpatti' means attainment. In Buddhism, it means the attainment of meditational state. For the Abhidharma-s, it connotes an attainment in which there is complete evenness in mind and body – a connotation supposedly conveyed by the prefix 'sam' taken in the sense of samatā (evenness, stability). The ideationless attainment and cessation attainment are two meditational attainments in which there is completely no mental activity at all. The cessation attainment (nirodha-samāpatti) also called the attainment of the cessation of sensation and ideation belongs to the stage of existence-peak, that is the state of fourth ārūpya, the neither-ideation-nor-non-ideation attainment which is the highest state of saṃsāric existence: "When one has been detached with regard to the abode of nothingness, there is a disjoined dharma (which can cause) the cessation of the thought and thought-concomitants of one in the stage of the existence peak. As it causes even the same continuation of the Great Elements, it is named the cessation-attainment.

The Dārṣṭāntika-s are also open to the doctrines of other schools. They share a view with some Vibhajyavādins on time: "The Dārṣṭāntika-vibhajyavādins maintain that time and the conditioning forces are distinct entities. Time is a permanent entity; the conditioning forces are impermanent entities. When the conditioning forces are coursing in time, they are like the fruits in a vessel, coming out from this vessel and turning into that vessel.

Bīja theory – Aśvaghoṣa

This is an important theory of the Dārṣṭāntika-s. They were the first to articulate the bīja theory. Latent defilements are like seeds. Craving is in seed form, finally one gets the fruits as the actual manifestation. The Dārṣṭāntika use the seeds as an explanation. The sprout arises as a result of the seed, yet the seed is not the sprout itself. The two are neither identical nor different (not annihilation, no externalism). Likewise is the birth of a sentient being (Buddhacarita). Buddhacarita is written by Aśvaghoṣa, who was the greatest Buddhist poet during the court of King Kanishka. He wrote about the Buddha's life in beautiful poems.

“Their anuśaya (latent defilements) remains, like fire covered by ashes.

That, friends should be appeased by you through cultivation, like fire through water. For those [desires] proceed again from that [anuśaya], like the sprouts from the seed.

“On account of the it’s destruction, those [desires] would exist no more, like the [non-existence] of sprouts from the destruction of the seed.” (*Saundarananda*)

Bīja theory – Kumāralāta

"Now I would like to give a simile (drṣṭānta) in order to make its meaning clear. Just as the seed of a crop which, as a result of the coming together of various conditions, gives rise to the sprout. However in reality this seed does not produce the sprout. By virtue of the fact the seed ceases, there is the growth of the sprout; because the seed ceases, there is no fault of externalism. By virtue of the fact that there is a growth of the sprout, there is no annihilationism." Kumāralāta strives to avoid externalism and nihilism: since the seed ceases, this is not externalism: since the sprout is produced, this is not nihilism. Thus the bīja theory originates with Kumāralāta, who attracted followers from Sarvāstivāda and Abhidharma schools.

The Dārṣṭāntika-s and Sautrāntika-s contributed a lot to Buddhist logics from their preaching and similes. We speak of their distinctive characteristics but it is difficult to speak of their tenets. The arguments are based on similes (drṣṭānta). In the 19th century C.E. in Central Asia, a manuscript was found which proved that the Drṣṭāntāmalā-Śāstra and the Sūtrānlankāra (existing in Chinese, attributed to Aśvaghoṣa) are the same work. In the proper historical perspectives, the early Dārṣṭāntika-s were Sarvāstivādins, the relatively later Dārṣṭāntika-s were Vibhajyavādins.